

Hello. My name is Debby Painter and I am the product of an American GI and a French Mother. Forty years ago, my brother and I were 4 and 5 respectively when we came to this country. Even though we didn't speak a word of English, we were immediately thrown into kindergarten. No one taught us in French - our English was learned by pointing at an object and then given the English word. My Mom attended English classes a couple nights a week.

As one who had to learn English in the most difficult way, it has always bothered me to hear that teaching children or not allowing foreign residents to be able to access education, voting rights, TV, radio, etc in their "home" language would deny these individuals of their culture and would put them at a disadvantage in the United States. I grew up in Los Angeles with areas such as Little Korea, Chinatown, and Little Japan, areas where the Oriental culture is alive and well. In these communities, there was never talk of teaching children in another language than English. Cultural languages were taught as secondary languages or most frequently taught at home. In my parents' home we always spoke French - my Father included. I remember some of their friends joking as they were leaving through the door that they were "now going back to America." To this day French is still spoken in their home as well as when we speak to each other. Bottom line, it is up to the families and the neighborhoods themselves to keep their cultures alive not the government.

Let's get real and a little controversial. This argument of teaching children in their home language really became an issue with the large influx of Hispanics from Mexico in the past 20 years or so and mostly the power of their advocates. Sounds racist I know, but do we hear the French, Arabs, Germans, etc complain about the lack of education in their own language? Are teachers, social workers, and others in positions dealing with the public being forced to learn these languages in order to obtain or retain a

position? Do we have the option of pushing a number in order to speak to someone in our "home" language? No. I know that many of the advocates for Hispanic groups are screaming that by not offering services in Spanish, the government is discriminating against this one group of people. The truth - I feel myself and the others in this country from other parts in the world are the ones being discriminated against, not the Hispanics.

In most countries of the world, with few exceptions, one language is designated as the official language. It is not to be racist or culturally destructive; it is for the exact opposite - it is based on the notion to unify the country as one. We in this State as well as in the country as a whole need to look at what singling out a single nationality and its language is doing to our culture. Personally I think it is breaking down our society and causing resentments where none should be. I believe it best for this melting pot we call Michigan to adopt English as our official language and let those who chose to come to this country and this state learn its language. I did and so for many generations, so did my family. I for one whole-heartedly support this new proposal and hope that it will pass. In a country becoming more and more divided, anything that can bring unity can't be all bad....